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LETTERS.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM NELSON¹ TO EDWARD HUNT, ESQ.

VIRGINIA, *May 11th*, 1771.

DEAR SIR: I find by your Letter of Jan^y 16th as well as by one from Mr. Jasper Maudant to my Brother, that the Idea of an American Episcopate is very alarming to the Dissenters in England; and I can hardly conjecture why they are so much concern'd about what may happen here on this subject, unless tis on acc^t of what their Bretheren on this side the Atlantick may suffer from it. This subject has been treated in a Masterly Manner by D^r Chandler & some able men on the other side of the question, in some of the northern Provinces; and yet the Virginians, tho' almost all of the Episcopal Church, have as yet taken no part in the Dispute, the reason I believe is, that it is a matter of more Indifference to us than to the other Provinces which are full of every kind of Dissenters inimical to Episcopacy. We do not want Bishops; yet from our Principles I hardly think we should oppose such an Establishment; nor will the laity apply for them; Col^l Corbin having assured me that he hath received no Petition to get sign'd or any thing else about it from D^r Porteus.²

¹ William Nelson, of Yorktown, York County, Va., eldest son of Thomas Nelson, progenitor of the Nelson family in Virginia, and Margaret Reade, his wife, was born in 1711, and died November 19, 1772. He married Elizabeth, only daughter of Nathaniel Burwell, of Gloucester county, and Elizabeth Carter his wife, second daughter of Robert Carter and Judith Armistead, his wife. He was long a member of the Virginia Council, and on the death of Lord Botetourt, October 15, 1770, Nelson, being then president of the council, was by virtue of his office invested with the government of the Colony, which he administered until the arrival of Lord Dunmore early in 1772. This letter is extracted from the letter-book of William Nelson, preserved at the Episcopal Seminary in Alexandria. He was father of General Thomas Nelson, of the Revolution.

² Dr. Porteus, here mentioned, was Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London, son of Robert Porteus, formerly of the Virginia Council, and who was son of Edward Porteus, of Gloucester county, Va. (See QUARTERLY, III., pp. 28, 38.)

But M^r Horrocks, the Bishop of London's Commissary here, hath invited all the Clergy of the Colony to meet soon, in order to consider of an application for the Purpose; which he tells me he hath done in compliment with the pressing Instances of some of the English Clergy to the Northward. This gentleman goes to England for his Health this Summer; possibly a Mitre may be his Polar Star; for we know there is much magnetic Virtue in such Dignities, and I tell him that he will be too late, if he does not embark soon, to which he with the usual Modesty of a Priest on such Occasions answers *nolo Episcopari*. Believe him, who will, say I, when this Convocation is over, I fancy I can find out what they have done, & will let you know how the Affair goes on; for Parsons are not as Free Masons sworn to secrecy; nor is it often that We find so much Cordiality among great Bodies of them; so that I should not wonder if we should hear of the Virginian Schism, when the matter comes to be considered and debated by them; especially as many of our clergy were bred up Dissenters, whose Eyes have been open'd by the glare of 16000lbs Tob^o p^a annum.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your affect. humble servant,

WM. NELSON.

RICHARD BLAND¹ TO THOMAS ADAMS.²

VIRGINIA, August 1, 1771.

DEAR SIR: When I saw you last I think I had your promise not to be unmindful of an old acquaintance, who will receive particular pleasure to hear from you of your health, and to have an account of what is transacting on the other side of the Atlantic, particularly relative to America.

To remind you of this promise is one occasion of this letter; the other is to give you a narrative of the most interesting Events that have happened since you left us. And if, in doing this, you find me, like most old Fellows, fond of Garrulity, I beseech you not to impute it as an incident of old age, but to a desire to oblige you, since I know it will be agreeable to you to hear of what is transacting in your native country.

Upon the 27th of May a most dreadful Inundation happened in James, Rappahannock and Roanoke Rivers occasioned by very heavy and incessant Rains upon the mountains for ten or twelve days, during which time we in the lower part of the country had a

serene sky without the appearance of a cloud. The Rivers rose to the amazing Height of forty Feet perpendicular above the common Level of the Water. Impetuous Torrents rushed from the mountains with such astonishing Rapidity that nothing could withstand their mighty Force. Promiscuous Heaps of Houses, Trees, Men, Horses, Cattle, Sheep, Hogs, Merchandise, Corn, Tobacco & every other Thing that was unfortunately within the dreadful sweep were see Floating upon the Waters, without a possibility of their being saved. The Finest Low Grounds were ruined, and many of the best Lands totally destroyed; those which escaped, the best being like the Deserts of Arabia covered with large Bodies of White Sand, in many places six Feet deep. Three Thousand hogsheads of Tobacco were lost from the Public Warehouses; and about the same number from the different Plantations upon the Rivers. The total damage to the Country is computed at two millions Sterling & I do not think it is exaggerated.³

This severe Stroke occasioned a meeting of the Assembly to provide for those sufferers whose Tobacco was lost from the Public Warehouses, which, by our Law, must be made good.

The assembly, at the very earnest solicitation of merchants (who were the most considerable sufferers in the Tobacco lost from the Warehouses) have emitted £30,000 in Treasury notes, redeemable by adequate Taxes in four years, which has given the merchants great satisfaction, and their eulogies upon the House of Burgesses are sung in all companies. I cannot but remark, upon this occasion, the different conduct of the Merchants at this Time, & during the last War. When we were invaded by a Foreign Enemy, and were called upon, from time to time, by the Royal Requisitions for Supplies to defend the Country, & to co-operate with the King's Regular Troops in their several expeditions; when the Colony was exhausted of all its Specie, and could not borrow the sum of £10,000, upon the best securities, altho' they offered an Interest of 6 per cent., and would have given 8 per cent. rather than have been concerned with Paper money; when under these circumstances, we were Forced against our Inclinations to emit Treasury notes, or refuse to comply with the Royal Demands, the merchants raised such a clamour, and represented the House of Burgesses, by their Memorials to the Board of Trade & Plantations, in such dark and disadvantageous colours, that they drew very severe, and, as time has demonstrated, very unjust censures from that Board upon the conduct of the Assembly; and they did

not desist till they procured an act of Parliament restraining the Governor from giving his assent to any act of our Legislature, for making Paper Bills of credit a Legal Tender. But now, when their private Interest is affected; when they are in danger of Bankruptcy, and their credit is likely to be Injured, they are become the warmest and most Forward Solicitors with the Assembly for that very Species of money they abused the Assembly for emitting to defend the Colony from a common enemy. Such is, and such forever will be, the conduct of men who prefer their own Interest to the Public good.

And now I am upon the Subject of Paper money, I will take the liberty to inform you that of £750,000 issued in Treasury notes in the course of the last war, only £103,000 is in circulation, upon the Supposition that none of the money issued has been lost; but it is certain a large sum has been destroyed by different casualties, so that, by the best computation, not more than £60,000 is in actual circulation, and the merchants are become so very Fond of it, that tho' the Time of its redemption has long since expired, they exert every endeavour to prevent its being paid into the Treasury, from whence, they know, it will never more make its appearance, but must be burnt by a standing committee appointed for that purpose.

It really affords diversion to those who remember their Former opposition to see their anxiety to keep this money in circulation, against the repeated advertizements of the Treasury in our public papers, calling upon the holders of it to carry it in, & exchange it for gold and silver, which not one of them can be prevailed upon to comply with.⁴

Our export of Tobacco will be at least 6000 hhds short of what it would have been had not this misfortune happened, and you may depend it will be considerably shorter the ensuing year, as no Tobacco can be made upon the Low Grounds, where such large quantities used to be made, and the heavy & almost continual rains since the Fresh have destroyed great part of that which was growing upon the high Lands. But let me find out another subject. You know M^r Horrocks, who by a Fortuitous Concatenation of Events has been advanced to many profitable appointments in this Country. He is just gone for England, as he says for the Recovery of his health. Before he left us he called a convention of the Clergy, as Bishop's Commissary, to consider, as he himself expresses it, of the expediency of an American Episcopate.

Our Clergy, I believe there are about one hundred of them, only eleven of them obeyed his Summons. But notwithstanding the smallness of the number they proceeded to consider this important Question. Eight (of which number Mr Horrocks was one) were for the Expediency, & four against. After much Jangle & Disputation, Formal Protests were published in the Gazettes by the four Protesters, against the legality as well as regularity of the proceeding. This brought on a Severe Paper War. Mr Camm, Rector of York-Hampton & one of the Professors of Divinity in our College, commenced Champion for a Bishop; and Messrs. Henley & Gwatkin, the two professors of Philosophy, appeared in the Field of Battle against a Bishop. This War continued with much violence & personal abuse till the meeting of the Assembly, when the House of Burgesses put an end to it, at least Publickly by declaring unanimously against the expediency of an American Episcopate, and returned thanks to the four Clergymen for opposing a Measure by which much Disturbance, great anxiety and apprehension would certainly take place among his Majesty's Faithful Subjects in America.

And, indeed, my friend, if this scheme had been effected, it would have overturned all of the acts of Assembly relative to ecclesiastical jurisdiction, most of which acts have received the Royal assent, & have existed among us almost from the first establishment of the Colony. By these acts, our Vestries, who are the Founders of our churches, are made the Patrons within their several Parishes. Like Donatives in England, the Vestries have a Right to nominate any clergyman as their minister who produces to the Governor a testimonial that he hath received Ordination "From some Bishop in England," and every Clergyman so nominated and received by the Vestry in any Parish is entitled to all the Spiritual & temporal Benefits of his Parish as much as if he had been Formally admitted, Instituted & Inducted by a Bishop.

It is true, if a Parish continues vacant above a year, in that case, the Governor as exercising the Right of the Supreme Patron within this Dominion is empowered to collate to such vacant Parish, but in no instance has he a right to interfere if the Vestry receives a Minister within a year after the vacancy happens.

Besides, the King has assented to the act of Assembly which declares that the general court shall take cognizance of and "have Power & jurisdiction to hear & Determine all causes, matters, or things whatsoever relating to or concerning any Person or Persons

ecclesiastical or civil; or to any Person or Things of what nature soever, the same shall be," so that our whole ecclesiastical constitution, which has been Fixed by the King's Assent, must be altered if a Bishop is appointed in America with any Jurisdiction at all, which will produce greater convulsions than any thing that has ever as yet happened in this part of the Globe. For let me tell you, a Religious Dispute is the most Fierce and Destructive of all others to the Peace & Happiness of Government. I remember the learned Author of the commentaries upon the Laws of England says that if, upon the Reformation of Religion under Henry the 8th & his children, the spiritual courts had been re-united to the civil, the old Saxon constitution, with regard to Ecclesiastical Polity, would have been completely restored in England, & he seems to lament that this re-union had not been Effected.

If then we have been so happy as to establish this Polity & to re-unite the Ecclesiastical & civil Jurisdiction in our courts, it is, I think, the highest Presumption in M^r Horrocks & his seven associates to attempt so considerable alteration in our constitution as the Introduction of a Bishop must produce, without consulting, nay, expressly contrary to the consent of the Legislature of the country.

I profess myself a sincere son of the established church, but I can embrace her Doctrines without approving of her Hierarchy, which I know to be a Relick of the Papal Ineroachments upon the Common Law. I have dwelt the longer upon this subject because it is thought by some amongst us that Horrock's errand to England is to lay a Foundation for this Establishment, & that he expects to be the First Right Reverend Father of the American Church. But if he has any such Design he has in my opinion acted very im-politickly by making his appearance in England, since neither his address or abilities can possibly recommend him to so high an office. I acknowledge, for I will do him all justice, he made a tolerable Pedagogue in the Grammar School of our college. Here he ought to have continued; but unfortunately for his reputation, as well as for the College, he was removed from the only place he had abilities to fill, to be President of the College. This laid the Foundation of his other exaltations, & by a Sycophantic Behavior he had accumulated upon him the Rectorship of Bruton Parish, the office of Bishop's Commissary, of a councillor, of a judge of the General Court, and of Ordinary of Newgate, all of which offices he now possesses except that of attending the condemned criminals

in the Public Good, which he resigned upon his leaving the colony. Was his Sincerity & abilities equal to his good Fortune, he would be one of the most accomplished men amongst us. But he is not content with an accumulation of Preferments, he is attempting to soar higher by setting all America into Flame, in which, perhaps, he may be made the First Sacrifice.⁵ But I have dwelt long enough upon such a character. By the enclosed sheets of the House of Burgesses' Journals, containing their address in answer to the Presidents speech at the opening of the last Assembly, you will see the sentiments the country entertained of our late Governor. But the Assembly were not content in Demonstrating their Gratitude to the memory of that Excellent man by verbal declaration only, they have showed it by a more substantial evidence. A very elegant statue of him is to be erected at the Public expense, with proper Inscriptions expressing the grateful sense this country entertains of his Lordship's prudent and wise administration, & their great solicitude, to perpetuate, as far as they are able, the Remembrance of those many Public & Social virtues which adorned his illustrious character. These are the words of the Resolution. The motion of this Statue was no sooner made than an universal Plaudit rang through the House of Burgesses, and the cry was AGREED NEMINE CONTRA DICENTE. So high does the memory of this Worthy man stand in the opinion of this country. No certain sum is appropriated for this Statue, it is to be sent for to Great Britain, under the direction of six gentlemen who are to have it executed by the best Statuary in England, that it may be an ornament to our capitol, where it is to be Fixed, and a lasting & Elegant Testimony that this Country will ever pay the most distinguished Regard and Veneration to Governors of worth & merit.⁶

You do, I doubt not, think me very talkative, but have a little more patience, & I will give you no further trouble at this time. Pray, what has become of Montague,⁷ our late agent? I suppose he takes his removal in great dudgeon. I confess I had some share in displacing him. I cannot recollect a single Instance in which he was serviceable to this country, & I think it useless & unjust to continue him longer in office. His Salary did not expire till the 10th of April last, & yet he has given us no account of the acts passed & transmitted to England twelve months before that time, altho' some of them were of considerable Importance, particularly the Burgesses act, & that for preventing the exorbitant exactions of the Public collectors, on which we had our hearts greatly Fixed. Is not this an evidence of great Neglect in him?

Let me Whisper something in your ear, which perhaps will be no disadvantage to you. I expect an attempt will be made the next session to continue Montague agent. I am convinced the Interest which will support him is not strong enough to get him continued, but I believe an agent will certainly be appointed. Suppose, then, you should exert yourself in procuring the Royal assent to those Favorite acts which are now before the Board of Trade, & should transmit them by the very First opportunity. Such a Service, let me tell you, will do you no injury in the opinion of our Burgesses, & might pave the way for your friends exerting themselves in your Behalf. At the worst, the expense will not be great, which I am convinced the Burgesses will repay you. A word to the wise is sufficient.

We know nothing as yet of our new Governor's [Lord Dunmore] coming amongst us. Sometimes it is said he will come, at other times that he will not. We entertain a very disadvantageous opinion of him from the accounts brought to us from New York. I will tell you one of his exploits which Wood, member for Frederick County, who you know, brought to the Assembly from New York, from whence he had just returned. His Lordship, with a set of his Drunken companions, sallied about midnight from his Palace, and attacked Chief Justice Horsmanden's coach & horses. The coach was destroyed & the poor horses lost their tails. The next day the Chief Justice applied to Government for Redress, and a proclamation issued, by advice of the Council, offering a reward of £200 for a discovery of the Principal in this violent act. We have not heard whether the Governor demanded the Reward. I have a mighty Inclination that the substance of this letter (contained between the two lines in the margin from the First to the Seventh page) should appear in some of the Publications in England. If you think the language will bear printing, I give you leave to make that part of it publick, for I am mighty Desirous the Clergy scheme for an American Bishop should be made as publick as possible to stir up an opposition to it from the Dissenters, who will be terribly scourged by the Ecclesiastical Floggers, as the act of Toleration is not in Force in this country.^s I am, Dear Sir,

Your very affectionate Servant,

RICHARD BLAND.

NOTE.—If you send any part of it to the Press, you need not publish my name. Let the address also appear in the Public Papers.